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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

CALVERLEY PARK AND CALVERLEY GROUNDS

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Name:	CALVERLEY PARK AND CALVERLEY GROUNDS
County:	Kent
District:	Tunbridge Wells (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.130941 Longitude: 0.26844799 National Grid Reference: TQ 58820 39298 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000266 Date first listed: 01-May-1986

Details

A mid C19 landscape of villas in parkland, laid out by the architect and builder Decimus Burton, part of which was developed as a public park in the 1920s.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Calverley Park and Grounds and adjoining property which together formed the Calverley estate was acquired in 1820 by John Ward. Development of the villas and their associated landscape setting, to designs by Decimus Burton, began in the autumn of 1828 (Colbran 1840) and was complete by 1839. The Ward Estate remained the freeholder, the villas being occupied leasehold until they were progressively sold off from 1947 and the parkland became the property of the trustees of the Calverley Park Association. In November 1920, the western half of the site, known as Calverley Grounds, was acquired by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council for a public park. The site remains (1999) in the hands of the individual villa owners who form the Calverley Park Association, the local authority, and a number of further individual and commercial private owners.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Calverley Park and Grounds lie within the built-up centre of Tunbridge Wells, to the immediate east of Mount Pleasant Road which runs due north through the town centre, and c 130m north-east of the railway station. The registered site of c 11ha comprises 4.5ha of public park, 3ha of communal parkland, and 3.5ha of villa and other private gardens. The site lies on the plateau and steep, south-facing slopes of Mount Pleasant and extends across the floor of the narrow west-facing valley which separates Mount Pleasant from the further crest of Mount Sion to the south. From the higher slopes and the plateau there are extensive views westwards and southwards, through tree cover, over Tunbridge Wells and to the more distant countryside. The site is enclosed along its north and east sides by an almost continuous stone wall (sections are missing towards the west end of the northern boundary and Calverley Park Crescent has no wall), built as part of the original layout, which forms the boundary with the adjacent Crescent Road, Calverley Road, and Prospect Road. To the south the site is enclosed by the rear fences and hedges of mid C19 to late C20 commercial and housing development and to the west by late C20 commercial buildings and associated car parks on the east side of Mount Pleasant Avenue.

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ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance to Calverley Park is on the north side of the site, from Crescent Road, through the high carriage arch of the west-facing Victoria Lodge (listed grade II*) which has a single-storey lodge room on each side. Some 60m east of the Lodge, the main drive is met by a secondary drive which skirts the south-east boundary of Calverley Park Crescent gardens from an entrance to the park on Calverley Road at Keston Lodge, an octagonal single-storey building of 1828-31 (listed grade II*), the vehicle and one wicket gate to which were replaced in 1989 (the second wicket gate survives from the original layout). The entrance to Calverley Park Crescent is immediately to the west of Keston Lodge. The main drive from Victoria Lodge then passes through a further set of timber vehicular and wicket gates, erected in the 1950s to a design by the architect Cecil Burns (1882-1969), then sweeps eastwards and southwards along the villa frontages to a set of matching gates at the single-storey Farnborough Lodge (listed grade II*). Built of Tunbridge Wells stone, this is shown on Britton's plan of 1832.

The main entrance to Calverley Grounds, marked by a mid C20 lodge and wrought-iron gates, lies at the south-west corner of the site, 60m east of Mount Pleasant Avenue.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS Calverley Park consists of twenty-four villas (all listed grade II*), their varied designs forming a homogenous whole, which are arranged in a quadrant, on level ground, around the north and east perimeter of the site. Nos 1 and 5 to 24 overlook the park while nos 2 and 4 stand on the north side of these and are approached from Calverley Road. All the villas, except nos 3 and 4, which are faced with stone cut to resemble brickwork, are built of stone quarried in large blocks. All have slate roofs except nos 3 and 4 which are tiled. The various designs include two pairs of semi-detached villas (nos 5-6 and 9-10) and six Regency-style villas with curved or canted bays (nos 7, 11, 13, 15, 22 and 24). The development, completed by 1839 (Plan, Colbran) was begun in 1828 as a 'self-contained village landscape - virtually a new town', to designs by Decimus Burton (1800-81) and was composed as 'an economic, architectural and scenic unity' (CL 1969). Considerable alteration to a number of villas occurred during the later C19.

Some 100m west of the villas, on the north boundary and overlooking Calverley Grounds, is the Calverley Hotel (listed with its forecourt wall and gate piers grade II), a three-storey stone building erected by the Earl of Egremont in c 1760 as Great Mount Pleasant and shown on Britton's plan of c 1832 as Calverley House. It was largely rebuilt as a hotel in 1840 (CL 1969). The seventeen houses forming Calverley Park Crescent (listed grade II), completed by 1835, lie to north-west of the villas (outside the area here registered).

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The villas facing onto the park are each laid out with a c 20-30m long front garden, these being largely laid to lawn and shrubbery and enclosed from the park drive by tall, dense hedging. The communal parkland extends westwards in a crescent shape, on level ground at the narrow, north end but broadening and sloping gently at the southern end in a similar form to that shown on Britton's plan of c 1832. The parkland is laid to grass with informal clumps and individual trees of mixed ages and species, a few of the mature oaks and cedars and two extensive clumps of rhododendron surviving from the pattern established by the 1860s (OS) which itself is sparser than that illustrated on Britton's plan. The system of winding paths shown laid out in the late C19 has now (1997) gone, although it appears to have survived at least until 1937 (OS). The western boundary of the parkland is formed by a stone-walled ha-ha, the views to Calverley Grounds and the distant landscape now (1997) largely concealed by a continuous hedgerow along the top of the wall. The surrounding rural landscape contributed to the setting of Calverley Park in the early C19, Britton (1832) describing the villas as 'having a most extensive tract of wild and cultivated country within their command'.

To the north-east of Victoria Lodge, and enclosed from the parkland and the villas by a tall, dense hedge, is the communal garden of the houses in Calverley Park Crescent. Their stuccoed and stone-paved balconies open south-eastwards onto a drive and a long, crescent-shaped lawn backed by a broad mixed border against the hedge. The gardens were originally laid out in the early 1830s with a promenade extending the length of the lawn and a central tiered fountain (contemporary illustration, in Whitburn 1980), the layout replaced by the late 1860s (OS) with one similar to the present arrangement.

Calverley Grounds, the public park, lies on the west side of the site. A broad path from entrance gates at the lodge (built by 1924, photographs) leads eastwards along the floor of the valley to an octagonal bandstand and tea room which replaced an earlier bandstand and associated thatched tea pavilion built by 1924 and destroyed by bombing in 1940. These are enclosed along the

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north side by a steep bank of heathers and conifers. A flight of stone steps east of the bandstand leads up to a rectangular rose garden enclosed with drystone walls and with a raised central bed. Eastwards, beyond the rose garden, the upper level of the valley floor is terraced to form a bowling green. The sloping valley sides are planted with clumps, groups, and individual native and exotic trees and islands of shrubbery with conifers. At the east end, north of the bowling green, the slope is terraced to form two levels of fenced hard and grassed tennis courts. From 1832 (Britton) until they were laid out as a public park, Calverley Grounds were open in character with only a few individual and clumps of trees. They formed both an additional setting for Calverley Park villas and the pleasure grounds to the Calverley Hotel and contained a spring and a stream-fed lake (illustration by C Dodd of 1840) which lay to the south-west of the present bandstand. The lake was drained in 1850 with the arrival of the South-Eastern Railway in 1845 (CL 1969). The formal gardens to the hotel comprise a two-tier, south-facing linear terrace, enclosed along the lower, park, side by a high clipped hedge. The upper terrace is laid to lawn and rose beds either side of a central paved walk and the lower one to rough grass with trees. The terraces are shown established in this form on an estate map of 1839 (Colbran 1840) and on the 1st edition OS map.

REFERENCES

J Britton, *Descriptive Sketches of Tunbridge Wells and the Calverley Estate* (1832) J Colbran, *Guide for Tunbridge Wells* (1840) J Newman, *The Buildings of England: West Kent and the Weald* (1969), pp 560-1 *Country Life*, 145 (1 May 1969), pp 1080-3; (8 May 1969), pp 1166-9 P Whitburn, *Calverley Park Crescent*, guide leaflet, (Civic Society 1980) P Whitburn, *Catalogue to the Decimus Burton Centenary Exhibition*, (1981)

Maps J Britton, *Plan of the Calverley Estate*, c 1832 (in Britton 1832) Colbran, *Estate map*, 1839 (in Colbran 1840)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1868-74 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1868-74 2nd edition published 1897 3rd edition published 1909 1936 edition

Illustrations C Dodd, *View of Calverley Grounds*, 1840 (in CL 1969)

Archival items *Views of Calverley Grounds, Rose Garden, Tea House and Bandstand*, photographs, c late 1920s (Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery)

Description written: September 1997 Amended: January 1999 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: November 2003

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.